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## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### PortoRama/Damascus

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Michael Windle  
PortoRama / Damascus



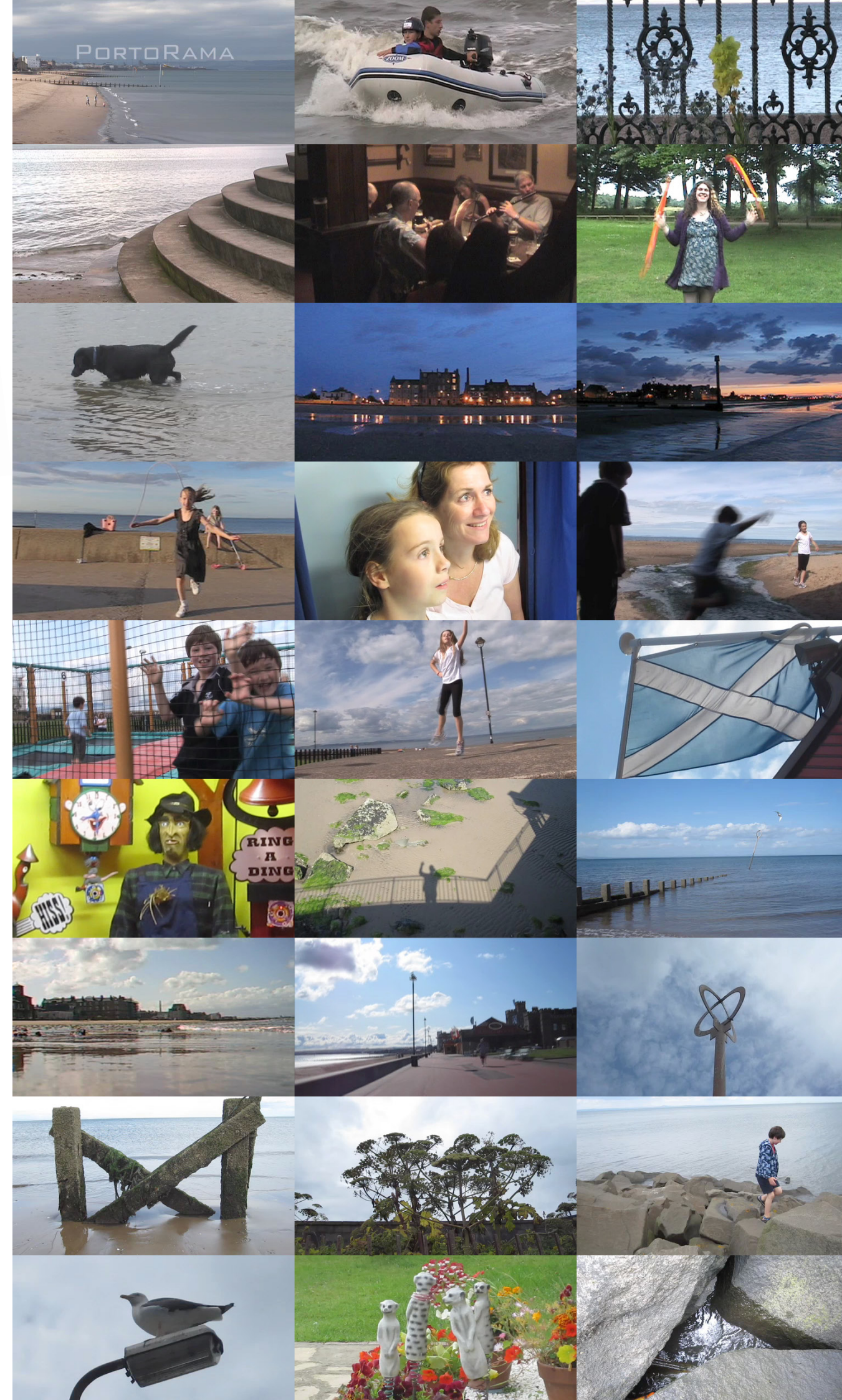


Michael Windle  
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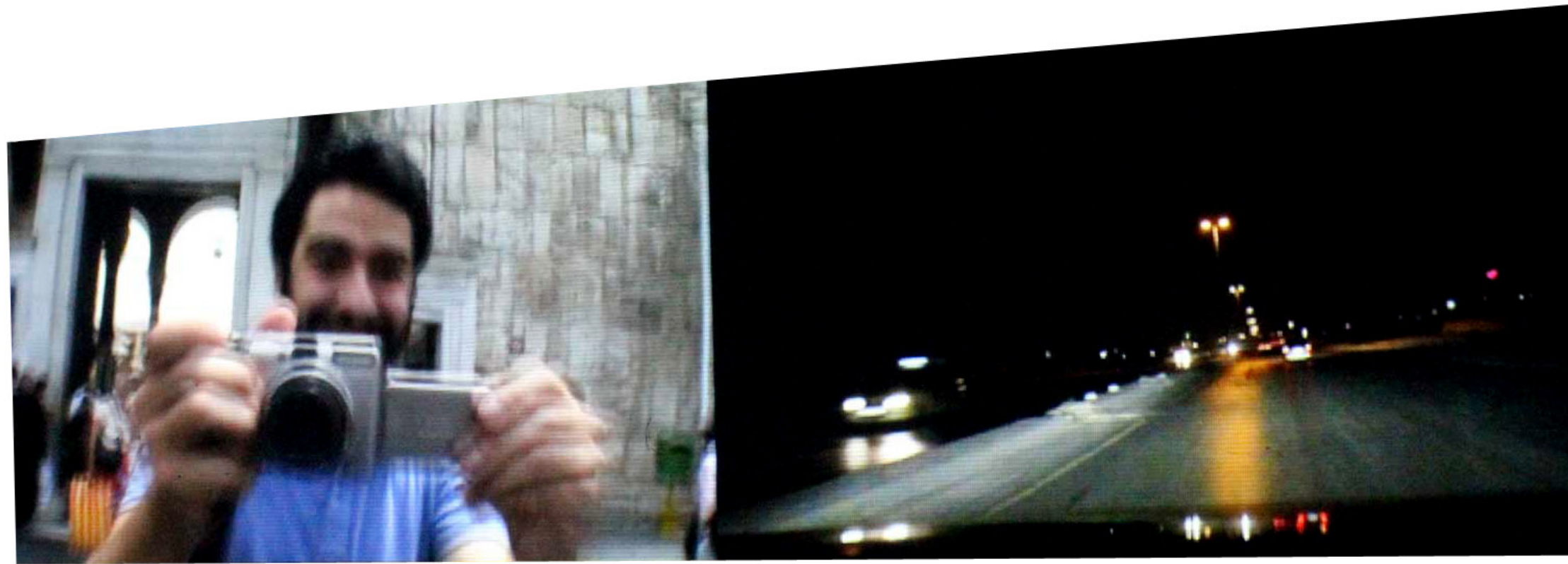
This research project is in two parts, the technical aspects being the same but created in two very different locations. It is conceived as a kind of AUTOMATICHOLLYWOODMACHINE, the content being crowd-sourced and all inclusive incorporating local filmmakers - amateur and professional.

Artists since 1900 have made experimental films that play with structure, narrative and materiel. These films have been rarely seen, a far cry from today's ubiquitous online video clip. This work updates these early mechanics by using computers to drive video originated by a YouTube savvy generation, allowing scenes to be played randomly in and out of order and in real time, while retaining an audiovisual poetic akin to traditional narrative cinema.



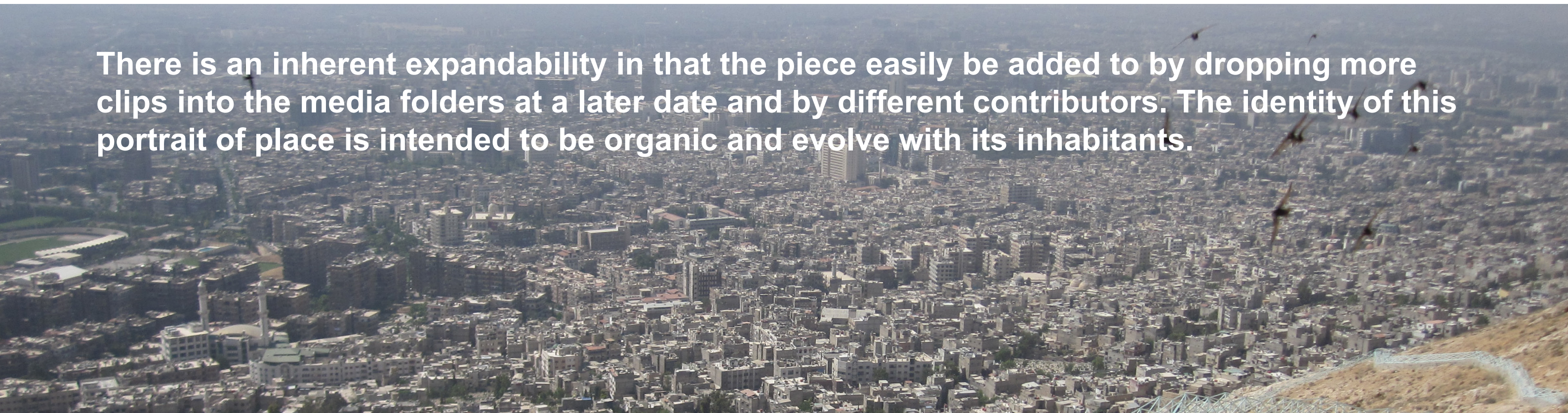


Michael Windle  
PortoRama / Damascus



In each location - Portobello, a seaside suburb of Edinburgh and Damascus in Syria, a call was made via local arts organizations for interested citizens to create personal videos of their neighborhood. These videos were then fed into a specially devised multimedia program that can run the clips in a non-linear way, in pairs split-screen, and with additional soundtracks creating a multitude of chance encounters, juxtapositions and narratives.

There is an inherent expandability in that the piece easily be added to by dropping more clips into the media folders at a later date and by different contributors. The identity of this portrait of place is intended to be organic and evolve with its inhabitants.





Michael Windle  
PortoRama / Damascus

There were a number of elements to the project that took a bit of getting used to - a middle eastern climate requires to our eyes a curious work pattern (day and night), which is reflected in the tonal balance of the work. Security issues necessitated permission to film in the souqs and on rooftops.

Syria is just starting to open up culturally, and many visual artists acquiring video equipment are being allowed authorship for the first time. It was interesting to discuss approaches to contemporary art. Western art education appears quite cold and dispassionate to Syrian eyes, especially considering current political events. Traditionally Syrian art has focused on calligraphy, which can sidestep problems with the religious depiction of identity. New methods of art production such as video and the increasing ease and speed of dissemination can be seen as almost profligate by comparison, especially in the eyes of the traditionalists.





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PortoRama / Damascus

PortoRama film was commissioned by Big Things On The Beach - a regeneration project funded by City of Edinburgh and Creative Scotland - and shown as part of their inaugural exhibition in Portobello's Art House during the Edinburgh Festival in 2009.

The companion piece was shown in AllArtNow's exhibition space in the Old Town of Damascus in the following year. It was the culmination of a residency starting with a conference on contemporary international videoart and continued with a series of workshops over a month. The residency was funded by the British Council and the Delfina Foundation London and as such both related URLs carry news of the event. The exhibition was covered by a national television arts program as well as newspapers throughout the region.





## Michael Windle PortoRama / Damascus

For many of the participants both in Syria and Scotland this was a first opportunity to help make a film. The narratives the film creates are ever changing - I had hoped these projects could have carried on. Larger banks of video could then explore smaller themes within eg. mood, action, sonically etc. I had been invited back the following year (in 2011) to Syria to help set up a contemporary school of art in Damascus and had hoped to continue with the venture. Unfortunately for now, political events have overtaken me.

The two projects were about public engagement with a possibility everyone could bring something personal and meaningful to a moving image piece about something they know about - their home - and a questioning of traditional linear narratives in an age where everyone is a film-maker.

